

LITERARY MISCELLANY.

For the National Era.

A BROTHER'S RECOLLECTIONS OF AN ONLY SISTER.

BY MARY IRVING.

CHAP. X.

Another phase succeeded to school-girl life. "Imagine, if you can," she wrote, "your little blackwoods girl at a fashionable party—a veritable gathering of the grace, beauty, wisdom, and folly of the upper ten of Grace Conway; and my school-mate, who had just returned from Newport, sent us cards of invitation, with a special note to me, begging me not to disappoint her."

"Here was a dilemma. 'I cannot go!' I exclaimed, unconsciously thinking aloud in Augusta's presence. 'I have no dress for such an assembly.'"

"Oh! wretched!" said Augusta, carelessly. "Wear one of Pet's; you will find a dozen in her wardrobe."

"I felt my cheeks flush, as I was meditating how to decline the honor of Pet's proffered plumage; when Mr. Lemoyne very opportunely came up, and laid his broad hand upon my head."

"This little girl," said he, turning me around, "is to make her entrance into society in no borrowed finery nor tinsel whatsoever, or I mistake her! Wear your simplest white frock, child, and the curls Dame Nature gave you; and don't ape the fashions of sea ladies! No, no, Augusta! have you forgotten the old saying, 'Beauty unadorned, adorned the most?'"

"I felt my face kindle again. Mr. Lemoyne tapped it lightly, as he turned, saying—'That's right, Eulalie! let the warm blood in those cheeks always be as quick to reprove their praise!'"

"Augusta was almost indignant at my pertinacity; but I would wear no ornaments but those which I could borrow from her conservatory. We went at ten, P. M. Is it not ridiculous, this turning night into day? It was thoroughly accomplished, though, thanks to the brilliancy of the gas."

"Dazzled and bewildered, I passed through the crowd of glitter and grace, clinging to the arm of Mr. Lemoyne. He took pity on me, and drew me into a half-dimmed recess. A gentleman had found it before us. I looked up, to encounter the searching gaze of a pair of keen eyes, overarched by a rugged but commanding brow. 'He is a prince among men,' was my first impression."

"Ah, friend Atherton! just the man for us!" said Mr. Lemoyne, and introduced me. "Can you tell me," he added, "whether your 'bright particular star' has arisen upon this gay assembly; and, if so, where the light of her eyes is dispensing itself?"

"If I mistake not, in the east parlor," replied the gentleman, with a smile. "Leave your companion with me, sir, while you track the wandering star!"

"It is a happy chance, Miss Lincoln, that has thrown us together," said he, with a dignified ease, that banished half my confusion at finding myself tête-à-tête with a stranger. "I have long wished to meet the friend of my ward, Grace Conway!"

"Grace's guardian? I glanced up again into that noble face."

"So radiant, so queenly! diamonds flashing in her hair, adorning her like an angel at a ball. I could have shrunk into nothingness! But her eyes looked the same frank delight they had spoken in school days, as she caught my hand."

"So you have found out my Eulalie already, Professor Atherton, said she, throwing a childlike smile into her beautiful, upturned face. Then she whispered, earnestly, 'I begged her to come, that you might see and know her.' What followed, I can not tell."

"Prof. Atherton seemed determined, as Grace had requested, to 'see and know me' for he established himself as my attendant for the evening. I soon found that he was once a friend and classmate of poor Eben— that brother whom I learned to love and mourn for, long before I saw your face. I could have listened for weeks to Prof. A's eulogies upon his noble course; but Augusta must come, to insist upon leading me into the dancing-room. In vain I pleaded that I never had danced, and never should dance; that I chose to stay with the conversable part of the community; she dragged me off, a most reluctant captive."

"I never will forgive that insufferable husband of mine," she exclaimed, "for pinning you to the sleeve of such a bore! Atherton is one after his own heart! with learning enough to cause forty common brains! But what pleasure can a young girl find in hearing his long disquisitions?"

"I could have assured her that one young girl had found a pleasure, such as she had seldom known in life; a delight that would be a joy forever, in listening to his choicely-voiced sentiments; but it would have been a waste of words. So I held my peace, and followed her to the ball-room, to be bowed at and chattered to by living statues of language, was their only token of an immortal mind! Grace moved among them like a being from a better world. She swayed them at her will. 'What pleasure can it give her?' I could not ask myself. Yet she was in the highest spirit."

"It was so late as to be decidedly early, when Mr. Lemoyne at last bumbled me in my shawl, and placed me beside Augusta in the carriage. 'Well, how did you enjoy the evening?' was of course his first question."

"Augusta took the answer from me. 'To a sensible question to ask the child! No joy herself, to say the least! that proxy Professor of Lard and beetle-ology! She saw a little gaiety after I forcibly took her away!'"

"Mr. Lemoyne caught my half-smiling smile, as a street lamp threw its gleaming gleam upon my face, and observed, 'If I am a correct judge, that was the only part of the evening's entertainment she did not enjoy! Eh, Eulalie! Confess frankly!'"

"I like to see life in its varieties, sir; I answered, with some trepidation, for I feared an interminable wrangle upon a trifle."

"Spoken like a sensible girl! quite right!" responded Mr. Lemoyne, slowly and emphatically; and he withdrew into his Mackintosh and into silence."

"HOUSE OF AUNT TRYPHENA."

"Here I am at last! I really felt that I owed the dear old soul a debt of gratitude; and hearing that she had been ill, I hastened my exit. The red farm-house is still in a state of excellent preservation, with all its appointments, even to Zeb, who was the first familiar figure that greeted my vision. It was long before I could make him identify me with the little girl of long-learned memory. Zeb, who appears to have outgrown all his mischievous propensities, is aunt's chief stay in these years of feebleness, and bids fair to become a useful member of society. I found aunt sitting in the corner of the huge fire-place, which she never would suffer to be choked with a stove, wrapped in a shawl from head to foot, to keep off rheumatisms and the east wind, now, as ever, her deadly enemies, with those interminable blue stockings in her hand. Poor old aunt! I never thought to see her so delighted as she was upon recognising her protégée. She is growing mild and subdued in her second childhood, as befits one who draws near the shore of Eternity."

"So many associations have crowded this old farm, the wherryberry bushes on the hill, the chickadee knolls under the pine trees, in the edge of the woodland; but I will not weary with these."

"This evening I was sitting upon the front door-step, with an arithmetic in my hand, teaching Zeb how to compute the interest on a note of Aunt Tryphena's, soon due. He sat on the grass near me, clumsily fingering his pencil, and pondering every figure he put down. Wheels rolled down the hill so softly that I did not hear an approaching carriage until it had nearly reached the gate. The slightly-built forehead of Mr. Lemoyne peered from the window; and beside it was a face never to be forgotten by one who has ever seen it, that of Prof. Atherton. I felt a momentary confusion, as I glanced over the *tout ensemble* presented to these fastidious members of the aristocracy. But true nobility carries its own ease everywhere, impure as well as maintaining it."

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"That I mean to do, I answered. 'I shall teach them, and take notes with my own eyes!'"

"You to try a teacher's life—and afar from your friends!" He did not say it scornfully, yet there was something in his eye that puzzled me."

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"He did not tell me that she was ill; they did not tell me why they had come for me, until we reached the Asylum grounds. Then for the first time I learned that light had flashed up in that long darkened lamp of reason, at the losing of life's silver cord!"

"She was yet alive, thank God! I found her sleeping; and, brother, you know how I watched for her waking. She raised her sunken eyes, at length—the veil was lifted that had hung between us so long. I was a little child again, and she teaching me to say, 'Our Father!'"

"I have been dreaming—a long, strange, dream," she faintly said, fixing her eyes on mine. "Lady, will my children come before I die?—my noble Ralph, my little Lullie?"

"She started, I tried to say, as I grasped her wasted hand, 'don't you know your Lullie?'"

"Can it be? So many years?" she murmured, doubtfully, shading her heavy eyes with her hand."

"Yes, it is your father's look! Come to my heart, my child!"

"She spread her hands, and a gleam not of earth lighted her eyes. I lifted her in my arms, and with her heart close against mine, and lips upon her cheek, I struggled to gain control."

"Suddenly a thrill shook her frame and mine; the heart against my own fluttered violently, then stood still—forever! The shock of excitement had been too sudden; the 'wheel' was broken at the center, and the 'spirit' had returned to God, whomever it! Mother—mother!"

"I know not what I did, or how they took me from her; but I found myself lying on my couch, unconscious, with Professor Atherton at my side. Mr. Lemoyne had remained at the Asylum."

"Yes, weep, my child! it will do you good!" he exclaimed, with tenderness a strong man rarely shows. I begged him to take me back. "Be calm!" he replied; "I am taking you to Grace!" He lifted me from the carriage in his arms, and laid me, weak as a child, in those dear, sympathetic arms. Dear Ralph! It begins to seem to me a very sad one! Yesterday I sat for hours, with my hand resting on an open letter. My head swam—my heart was sick! I knew not what to do, nor where to turn for counsel. I did not hear a light footstep behind me; and Grace Conway had glanced over my shoulder, and unwittingly caught a glimpse of that outspread page, before I could shut it from her sight."

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"You are busy," she said, cheerfully; "I will not interrupt you!"

"No—stay!" I cried, springing to her side. "I am so unhappy! would that I could tell you why, dear Grace!"

"You need not," she gently replied. "Your heart is its own best counsellor—let it speak the truth, my friend! and, with an earnest pressure of the hand, she left me."

"I have no such restriction in regard to you, dear brother; I am at liberty to share with you the contents of that letter. You will wonder, as I do, that the fastidious Prof. Atherton, with his well-earned laurels, should ask a timid, ignorant girl to share his world-renowned name! Perhaps you will wonder still more that she declines the proffer."

"Yes, brother, I have taken counsel of my heart, as Grace bade me, and have followed the leading of its instinct. I know that such a treasure comes to few, even once in a lifetime. Disparity of years would, in the opinion of the world, be a thousand fold overbalanced by the rank, wealth, riches of intellect and of heart, that have been offered to my lowly lot. I can say, too, that I am almost alone in the world, and ought not to—will not—cling helplessly to your arm any longer. But can I make the happiness of a heart like his? Can I arouse the impulses slumbering in its depths for God and for humanity? Alas! richly dowered as this prince among men has been with the choicest gifts of Heaven, his pride takes little note of the Giver; feels little of the fearful responsibility that is thrown upon him! I cannot trust my heart to the guidance of such an one. I should be in his hands but a petted child, a mere automaton, following his steps with dazzled, blinded eyes."

"My artlessness and simplicity,"—the bud with the dew fresh upon it! Ah! he deceives himself in thinking he has loved me. It is only as a novel specimen of the genus girl that I have pleased his artist eye; and his pity has prompted the rest. There are heights and depths in that heart that I could never touch. One being alone could do it; the proud, strong, self-willed spirit that never submitted to any guidance but his, yet from childhood has been silently shaping itself to his wishes. He has so thoroughly moulded the character of Grace Conway, that he does not appreciate the work of his hands. She is to him as light or air; too independent, too much identified with his being, to be an object of note or of thankfulness to him."

"But it will yet be! mark me! Grace worships intellect above all earthly gifts. She would wear a lofty name as naturally as a queen her coronet. She is meet to shine at a side—not to sit in shadow at his feet! But—pride Grace will never be pitted."

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"Never!" I exclaimed, vehemently, flinging the letter from my hands."

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"Suddenly a thrill shook her frame and mine; the heart against my own fluttered violently, then stood still—forever! The shock of excitement had been too sudden; the 'wheel' was broken at the center, and the 'spirit' had returned to God, whomever it! Mother—mother!"

"I know not what I did, or how they took me from her; but I found myself lying on my couch, unconscious, with Professor Atherton at my side. Mr. Lemoyne had remained at the Asylum."

"Yes, weep, my child! it will do you good!" he exclaimed, with tenderness a strong man rarely shows. I begged him to take me back. "Be calm!" he replied; "I am taking you to Grace!" He lifted me from the carriage in his arms, and laid me, weak as a child, in those dear, sympathetic arms. Dear Ralph! It begins to seem to me a very sad one! Yesterday I sat for hours, with my hand resting on an open letter. My head swam—my heart was sick! I knew not what to do, nor where to turn for counsel. I did not hear a light footstep behind me; and Grace Conway had glanced over my shoulder, and unwittingly caught a glimpse of that outspread page, before I could shut it from her sight."